



Spotlight on Global Jihad

(May 21-27, 2015)



Main events of the week¹

- This week ISIS again focused on establishing and broadening its control over eastern Syria and western Iraq:
 - After the takeover of the city of Palmyra, in the Syrian Desert, ISIS forces took control of the Al-Tanf border crossing, the last Syrian-Iraqi border crossing that remained under the control of the Syrian regime. ISIS operatives also took over the Iraqi side of the crossing. ISIS is also establishing its control over the gas infrastructure in the Palmyra region, and began to provide assistance to civilian population in the Deir al-Zor region.
 - After the takeover of the city of Ramadi, ISIS is working to expand its control of the city's environs. On the other hand, according to media reports, Iranian-sponsored Shiite militias are now preparing for a "counterattack" to be mounted from the city of Habbaniyah, in order to recapture Ramadi. At this stage, the ITIC cannot verify the reports about a "counterattack".
- The fall of the city of Ramadi **raised doubts among the American leadership about the competence of the Iraqi Army**. The US Secretary of Defense said that the fall of the city indicated a lack of fighting spirit among the Iraqi forces. In the ITIC's assessment, the US statements indicate "second thoughts" about the Iraqi Army's capability of meeting the (exaggerated) expectations of the United States in the campaign against ISIS.

The international campaign against ISIS

US and coalition airstrikes

- This week, the US and coalition forces continued their airstrikes against ISIS targets. During the week, dozens of airstrikes were carried out in Syria and Iraq. Following are the main airstrikes (CENTCOM website):

¹ Following the ITIC's study on ISIS, from now on a weekly publication will be issued by the name of Spotlight on Global Jihad. The publication will monitor developments at ISIS and additional global jihad organizations and will focus on developments in the Middle East. We welcome comments from readers.

- **Syria** - the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Al-Hasakah, Aleppo, Deir al-Zor, Al-Raqqah, Kobani and Palmyra. The airstrikes damaged ISIS tactical units, battle positions, vehicles, heavy machinery, a rocket launcher, a car bomb, an anti-aircraft system and a mortar position, among other things.
 - **Iraq** - the airstrikes were concentrated in the areas of Al-Assad, Hawija, Baiji, Fallujah, Makhmur, Mosul, Haditha, Ramadi, Tal Afar, Kirkuk and Al-Baghdadi. The airstrikes damaged buildings, tactical units, vehicles, armored vehicles, IEDs, abandoned tanks and tunnel networks, among other things.
- Speaking to reporters, General **Martin E. Dempsey**, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US Army, said that he had previously claimed that the war against ISIS would take three years. This is still possible, but the way things look today, tactical changes may be made. This is due to the conduct of the Iraqi security forces or the conduct of ISIS. Nevertheless, Dempsey believes that the coalition forces still have all the strategic advantages. **He stresses that success against ISIS requires a commitment on the part of the Iraqi government, the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi people** (CENTCOM website, May 21, 2015).

Main developments in Syria



Map of Syria (Google Earth)

According to Rami Abdulrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), ISIS currently controls about 50% of Syrian territory (95,000 square kilometers). However, he says that only about 10% of the area under ISIS's control is settled. **The areas under the control of ISIS include most of Syria's oil wells, most of its gas sources and most of its water sources.** ISIS controls about **30% of the Al-Hasakah province** (northeastern Syria), **the Al-Raqqah province** (northern Syria), **most of the Deir al-Zor province** (eastern Syria), and **the northeastern part of the Aleppo province** (apart from the town of Kobani). ISIS operatives are also present in the **eastern periphery of Homs, from Palmyra to the border with Iraq and the eastern periphery of Hama, in central Syria.** According to Abdulrahman, **the Syrian regime controls about 23% of the country's territory; the Kurds control 5%, in the northeast of the country and in northern Aleppo; and other rebel organizations and Islamic factions control the remaining territory (22%) on the periphery of Damascus and in southern and northern Syria** (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, May 22, 2015).

Homs province

The city of Palmyra and its environs

■ **The city of Palmyra and its environs have been taken over by ISIS.** Earlier, on the night of May 20, 2015, the Syrian Army withdrew from the city. Before withdrawing, the Syrian Army moved items from the National Museum in Palmyra to "safe places," to prevent their destruction by ISIS operatives (Al-Akhbar, May 21, 2015). According to media reports, the takeover of Palmyra **was made possible by the reinforcements that ISIS brought from the areas under its control in Syria and Iraq.** This was after several days in which the Syrian forces deployed in the city managed to hold off ISIS, which suffered heavy losses (As-Safir, May 22, 2015).

The city of Palmyra is a key area in the center of the Syrian Desert, between Damascus and Deir al-Zor. It is also located at the center of the main routes for transporting oil and phosphates, near important mines and oil and gas fields (As-Safir, May 22, 2015). Its takeover by ISIS means that ISIS now controls the road linking the provinces in southern, northern and eastern Syria, thereby reducing the maneuverability of the Syrian Army. Palmyra may also serve as a base for mounting an attack on southeastern Damascus, mainly the Dumayr airbase, and on the Al-Suwayda province in the south (As-Safir, May 21, 2015).

■ According to Syrian media reports, after ISIS operatives took over **Palmyra**, they **murdered more than 250 soldiers and civilians, some of them children**. Some of the dead were Syrian soldiers, and some were employees of government institutions (Al-Watan, May 24, 2015). ISIS also took over the area near Palmyra Prison (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, May 21, 2015). ISIS reportedly reinforced its forces around the **Sha'er gas field**, but most of the field is still under the control of the Syrian Army (As-Safir, May 22, 2015).

The T-4 airbase

■ The Syrian Army, which retreated from the southern neighborhoods of Palmyra, is deployed at the **T-4 airbase east of Homs**. ISIS detonated two car bombs near the airbase (Al-Jazeera TV, May 21, 2015). ISIS previously tried to take over the T-4 airbase, but its attempts failed. This is an important airbase. It is believed that if ISIS manages to take over the airbase, this could undermine Syrian air support for the army forces fighting against rebel forces (As-Safir, May 22, 2015).



The T-4 military airbase between Palmyra and Homs (Wikimapia)

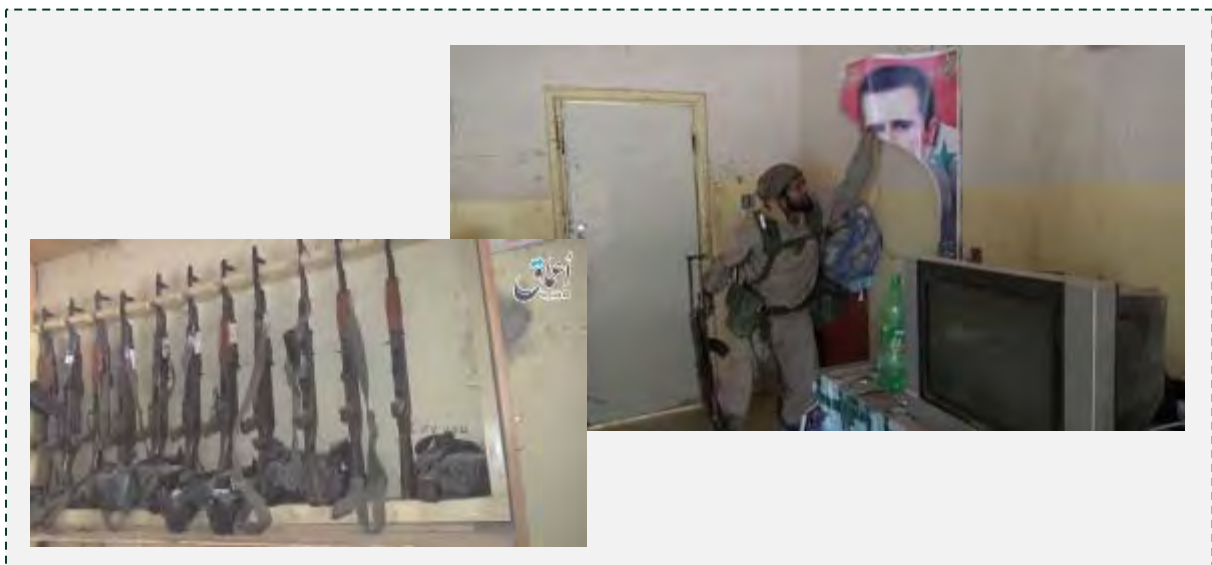
The oil and gas fields in the Syrian Desert

■ According to ISIS media reports, **ISIS has taken over the T-3 pumping station located approximately 44 kilometers east of the city of Palmyra (see map)**. Reportedly, as a result, **ISIS operatives are depriving the Syrian regime of approximately 75% of its energy needs (electricity and gas)**. The loss of the pumping station is in addition to the loss of the **Al-Hail** and **Arak** gas fields northeast

of the city of Palmyra, and important oil and gas fields such as **Jazal**, northwest of Palmyra (Amaq, May 21, 2015).



Energy infrastructure that fell into the hands of ISIS: The T-3 pumping station and the Arak and Al-Hail gas fields, to the east of the city of Palmyra (Wikimapia)



Left: Kalashnikovs left by Syrian soldiers at the T-3 pumping station (ISIS-affiliated Facebook account, May 21, 2015). Right: ISIS operative tearing down a picture of Syrian President Assad from the wall of the T-3 pumping station after the takeover (Amaq, May 21, 2015).

The takeover of the Al-Tanf border crossing between Syria and Iraq

■ On May 22, 2015, a few days after the takeover of the city of Palmyra, ISIS operatives took over the **Al-Tanf border crossing** (known as **Al-Waleed** on its Iraqi side). **This is the last border crossing between Syria and Iraq which was under the control of the Syrian regime.** The takeover of the crossing makes it easier for

ISIS to maintain contact between its forces in eastern Syria and in western Iraq (BBC, Al-Sumaria News, May 22, 2015). ISIS's control of this crossing and other border crossings also has **economic and governmental benefits**.

■ According to reports, on May 24, 2015, **ISIS operatives also took over the Al-Waleed crossing, the Iraqi side of the Al-Tanf crossing**. Large quantities of weapons and ammunition fell into the hands of ISIS operatives after the withdrawal of the Iraqi regime forces from the crossing (Al-Jazeera TV, May 24, 2015). Iraqi "security sources" said that during the takeover of the Al-Waleed border crossing, ISIS operatives made use of car bombs, which came from the Syrian side of the crossing (Al-Watan, May 24, 2015).



Top: The Al-Waleed crossing, between Iraq and Syria, which was taken over by ISIS. Right: The city of Rutba, which is controlled by ISIS and is located on the road from Ramadi to the Al-Waleed crossing.



Some of the Iraqi Army weapons at the Al-Waleed crossing, which fell into the hands of ISIS (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account, May 24, 2015)

Idlib province

■ In the Idlib province, in northwestern Syria, battles continued between the Syrian Army, which is supported by Hezbollah, and the Al-Nusra Front and its allies (Jaysh al-Fatah). The Al-Nusra Front and its allies (Jaysh al-Fatah) continue their efforts to take over the road from Idlib to Latakia on the coastal plain. On May 21, 2015, a video was posted showing Al-Nusra Front and Jaysh al-Fatah operatives **at the Al-Mastoumah army camp**, around five km south of Idlib, after taking it over from the Syrian Army (Al-Jazeera TV, May 21, 2015).



Left: The ruined wall of the Syrian Army camp. Right: Syrian Army APC that fell into the hands of ISIS and its allies at the Al-Mastoumah army camp (Al-Jazeera TV, May 21, 2015).

■ According to Syrian Army sources, the **Syrian Army managed to evacuate its men who were besieged at the Jisr al-Shughur hospital** (since April 25, 2015). They said that the Syrian Army secured their withdrawal with air and artillery support (Al-Mayadeen TV, May 22, 2015). According to other sources, dozens of people were killed in the escape from the hospital (Al-Jazeera TV, May 22, 2015). The Al-Nusra Front's media arm published a photo showing a Syrian soldier. According to the media arm, he was taken prisoner by Al-Nusra Front operatives after escaping from the hospital in Jisr al-Shughur. The media arm also posted photos of dead civilians who had escaped from the hospital (Al-Nusra Front-affiliated Twitter Account, May 23, 2015).



The city of Jisr al-Shughur, on the road to Latakia, and Mount Nabi Younes, which dominates the entire region (Google Maps)



Syrian soldier who, according to Al-Nusra Front operatives, was captured after escaping from the hospital in Jisr al-Shughur (Al-Nusra Front-affiliated Twitter account, May 23, 2015)

The southern Al-Qalamoun Mountains (along the Syrian-Lebanese border)

■ This week as well, **fighting continued between Hezbollah and Syrian forces and the Al-Nusra Front and its allies in the southern Al-Qalamoun Mountains, although its intensity was relatively low.** According to Hezbollah and Syrian Army forces, they have taken over several positions in the areas of Falita, Tell al-Sadr and Al-Boustan, in the southern Al-Qalamoun Mountains (Sama, May 20, 2015). At the same time, confrontations in the area between ISIS operatives and the Al-Nusra Front and its allies continued (Al-Manar TV, May 25, 2015).

■ Hezbollah is accompanying the battles in the Al-Qalamoun Mountains with a **vigorous propaganda campaign** designed to justify the fighting in Syria, to counter the Al-Nusra Front's media reports and to discredit its enemies in Lebanon:

- Hezbollah **organized a tour for journalists in the area of Al-Qalamoun** and the Syrian-Lebanese border. At the beginning of the tour, a military commander explained the importance of securing the high areas used as observation points and firing positions by the jihadi organizations. During the tour, the journalists visited near positions which were taken over during the latest attack (Al-Quds al-Arabi, May 22, 2015).

- In his speech on the occasion of the "Day of Resistance" (the IDF withdrawal from the so-called security zone on May 24, 2000), Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah stressed that the campaign in the Al-Qalamoun Mountains would continue until Hezbollah and the Syrian regime restored security along the entire Syrian-Lebanese border. According to Nasrallah, Hezbollah has captured the Al-Qalamoun ridge, apart from the Aarsal ridge (the northern Al-Qalamoun Mountains). He also mentioned Hezbollah's involvement in the civil war in Syria, claiming that this would increase insofar as necessary, throughout Syria (Al-Manar, May 24, 2015).

- According to Lebanese media reports, in a speech given by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah at a closed ceremony held on the anniversary of the "Resistance" (i.e., Hezbollah), he said that in the next stage, Hezbollah would probably announce a general mobilization of all operatives (As-Safir, May 23, 2015). In his speech on May 24, Nasrallah made it clear that he did **not** intend to carry out a general mobilization. He claimed that in his speech, he had said that the day may come when he will call for a general mobilization.

■ As part of their battle for hearts and minds, the Al-Nusra Front and Hezbollah's opponents in Lebanon often publish (exaggerated) reports on the extent of Hezbollah's losses in battle. Hezbollah attempts to ward off those reports. In his speech on the occasion of the "Day of Resistance," Nasrallah attacked the Lebanese who "count Hezbollah's shahids" in the campaign in Syria, stating that it is "a war for survival" that requires victims (Al-Manar TV, May 24, 2015). **In the ITIC's assessment, Hezbollah has actually suffered several dozen losses at the hands of the Al-Nusra Front**

and its allies in the fighting in the southern Al-Qalamoun Mountains, where so far it has the upper hand.²



The battle zone in the southern Al-Qalamoun Mountains (Google Maps)

Al-Hasakah province

- Kurdish YPG forces, with air support provided by the coalition forces, continued to advance in the western region of the Al-Hasakah province, **with the goal of taking over the road between Al-Hasakah and Kobani, and creating territorial contiguity under their control.** To this end, the Kurds took over Jabal Abdul Aziz (Mount Abdul Aziz), one of ISIS's strongholds in the Al-Hasakah province, and several other villages in the province.

² There are still conflicting reports regarding the number of losses sustained Hezbollah in battle in Al-Qalamoun: Hezbollah's opponents have published a list of 107 Hezbollah operatives who were allegedly killed in battles in Al-Qalamoun. According to the Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar, which examined the names on the list, many names are names of Hezbollah operatives who were killed years ago in other parts of Syria, including those killed in the Second Lebanon War (An-Nahar, May 20, 2015). According to Lebanon Debate, citing Al-Hadath News, 27 Hezbollah operatives have been killed in the fighting since the campaign began on May 7, 2015. Reportedly, there are still bodies in the area. As aforesaid, the ITC estimates the number of dead at several dozen.



The area between the city of Al-Hasakah and Kobani, which the Kurdish forces are striving to take over (Google Maps, May 2, 2015)

Deir al-Zor province (called Wilayat al-Khayr by ISIS)

ISIS's civilian activity

- Concurrently with its efforts to cleanse the Deir al-Zor province of the “pockets” of the Syrian regime, ISIS is working to establish its control over the civilian population. According to media reports, ISIS operatives have set up generators throughout the city of Deir al-Zor to provide electricity to the villages under their control. It was also reported that ISIS was generating electricity from its oil fields in Deir al-Zor and was charging around 1,000 Syrian pounds per month (around USD 3.60) per ampere of electricity (All4Syria, May 19, 2015).

In all the places under its control, ISIS takes care to fill the governmental vacuum that has been created and to provide the civilian population with most of the services that enable them to maintain the routine of daily life (water, electricity, fuel, education). This activity is usually carried out concurrently with the establishment of alternative government institutions while brutally enforcing Islamic religious law (Sharia).

Main developments in Iraq

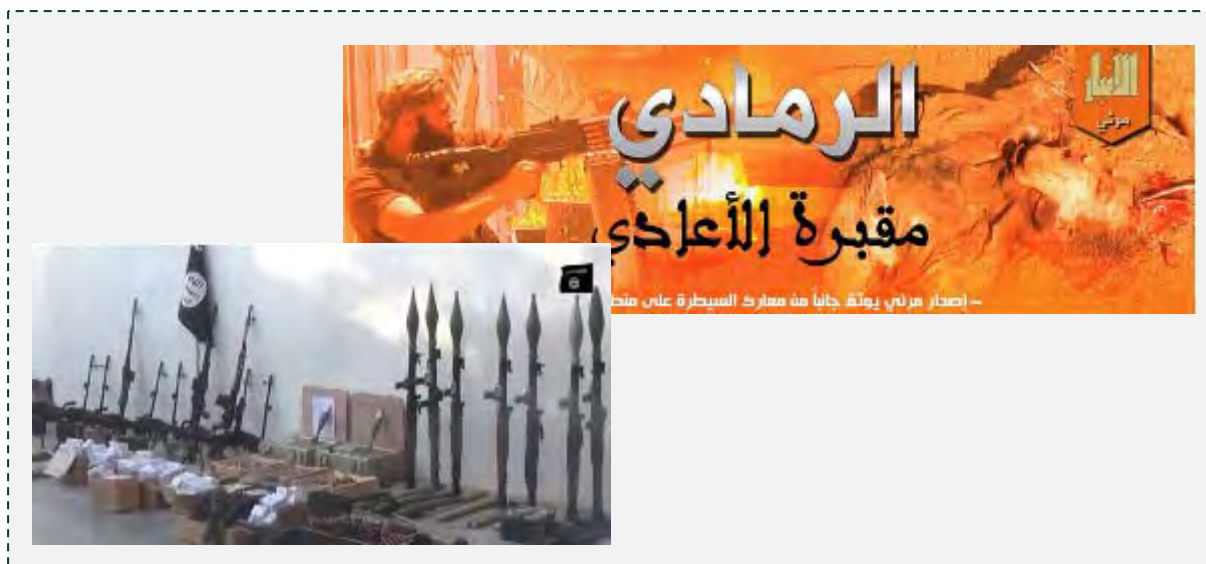


Map of Iraq (Google Earth)

Al-Anbar province

The area of the city of Ramadi

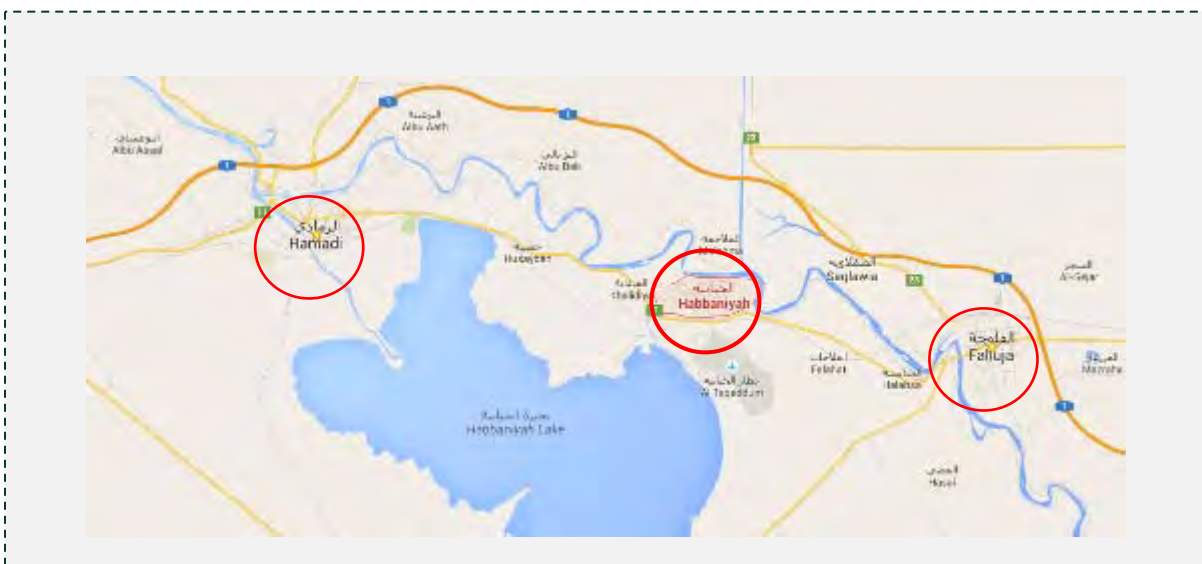
- After the takeover of the city of Ramadi, ISIS and the Iraqi forces are now preparing for the future. **ISIS is now working to cleanse the city's environs, while leveraging its takeover for propaganda purposes.** According to a report from May 22, 2015, ISIS operatives have taken over the areas of Al-Bu Fahd and Al-Madiq, located east of Ramadi (Shafaq News, May 22, 2015). On May 23, 2015, ISIS posted a video entitled "Ramadi, the Cemetery of the Enemies," showing ISIS operatives fighting in the area of **Al-Haouz**, about 1.7 km from the city of Ramadi (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, May 23, 2015).



The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS: The title of the video, “Ramadi, the Cemetery of the Enemies,” is visible at the top. The video deals with the battles for the takeover of Al-Haouz.

Left: Iraqi Army weapons that fell into the hands of ISIS in the fighting in and around Ramadi (Isdarat al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, May 23, 2015).

- According to media reports, Iran-sponsored Shiite militias are preparing for a “counterattack,” with the aim of restoring the Iraqi government’s control of the city of Ramadi. The city of Habbaniyah, one of the “pockets” controlled by the Iraqi Army in the Al-Anbar province, is reportedly the base for the expected “counterattack” (The Long War Journal, May 24, 2015). **At this stage, the ITIC cannot verify these reports.**



The city of Habbaniyah, located between Fallujah and Ramadi: Is it “in the crosshairs” of ISIS or will it serve as the launching pad for the Shiite militias’ “counterattack” to regain control of the city of Ramadi? (Google maps)

■ In addition to its activity in the city of Ramadi, **ISIS is dealing with additional “pockets” of Iraqi Army presence in the Al-Anbar province.** ISIS made use of **two French suicide bombers**, codenamed Abu Abdul Aziz al-Firansi (i.e., Abu Abdul Aziz the Frenchman) and Abu Maryam al-Firansi (i.e., Abu Maryam the Frenchman) in a suicide bombing attack carried out **in the city of Haditha** (which is still under the control of the Iraqi Army). One of the suicide bombers appeared in the past in an ISIS propaganda video, calling on volunteers from France to join the ranks of ISIS. Both suicide bombers used booby-trapped armored vehicles. After the two vehicles were detonated, clashes began between ISIS and the Iraqi security forces and a number of Shiite militias (The Long War Journal, May 24, 2015).



The two French suicide bombers who carried out a suicide bombing attack in the city of Haditha (The Islamic State’s media arm in the Euphrates province)

The fall of the city of Ramadi **has raised questions among the American leadership regarding the effectiveness of the support provided by the US to the Iraqi Army, and regarding the extent of the Iraqi Army’s motivation to fight against ISIS.** Referring to the fall of the city at the hands of ISIS, **US President Barack Obama** said that was undoubtedly a tactical failure. However, according to President Obama, the United States does not believe that it has lost the campaign, since the city of Ramadi has been vulnerable for a long time and it was not the focus of the US military support for the Iraqi Army (Daily Mail, May 21, 2015). **Moreover, US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter** criticized the Iraqi Army, saying that the fall of the city **indicated that the Iraqi forces lacked the will to fight.** He described their activity as “very concerning” (CNN, May 21, 2015). **In the ITIC’s assessment, these statements indicate “second thoughts” among the US leadership regarding the**

Iraqi Army's capabilities and its chance of meeting the (exaggerated) expectations of the United States.

Salah al-Din province

■ Battles continue between Iraqi forces and ISIS operatives over the control of the **refinery compound in the city of Baiji, north of Baghdad**. On May 24, 2015, a video issued by one of ISIS's media arms was uploaded to YouTube, showing oil refining and storage facilities in flames at the oil refineries in Baiji (ISIS-affiliated Twitter account; Amaq, May 24, 2015).



Oil refining and storage facilities in flames at the refinery in Baiji (Amaq, May 24, 2015)

Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula

Egyptian security campaign

■ **The Egyptian security forces continued their intensive campaign against the jihadists in the Sinai Peninsula.** These activities included helicopter airstrikes. A few dozen terrorist operatives were killed by the security forces. In addition, operatives were arrested, buildings, motorcycles and vehicles were destroyed, and barrels used for making explosives were blown up. Cars, two-way radios and weapons were also confiscated (Al-Masry al-Youm, May 21, 2015).

Jihadi activity

■ **On the other hand, intensive jihadi activity against the Egyptian security forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula continued.** This activity was manifested in

shooting attacks at facilities and checkpoints of the Egyptian security forces, the planting of roadside bombs and the abduction of soldiers and civilians suspected of collaborating with the Egyptian regime. Here are some of the activities:

- **On May 20, 2015**, the Egyptian security forces thwarted an attempt by armed men to fire at security forces in southern Sheikh Zuweid. This was after armed men on motorcycles approached the security forces and fired at them (Al-Youm al-Sabea, May 20, 2015).
- **On May 21, 2015**, two soldiers were injured in an explosion of an IED planted on a road in Sheikh Zuweid where an armored car of the Egyptian security forces was driving (Al-Masri al-Youm, May 22, 2015). Two other soldiers were wounded while deactivating IEDs in villages in southern Sheikh Zuweid (Aswat Masriya, May 21, 2015).
- **On May 22, 2015**, it was reported that armed men had abducted a wounded soldier and stolen an ambulance that was carrying two soldiers being evacuated for medical treatment in southern Al-Arish (Al-Masri al-Youm, May 22, 2015). In addition, armed men fired an RPG rocket at a checkpoint of the Egyptian security forces in Sheikh Zuweid. There were no casualties (Al-Youm al-Sabea, May 22, 2015).
- **On May 23, 2015**, unknown persons, apparently Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis operatives, abducted three civilians in Rafah at gunpoint, accusing them of cooperating with the security forces. Two of those who were abducted work at the Rafah crossing (Al-Masry al-Youm, May 23, 2015).
- **On May 25, 2015**, three mortar shells were fired at the Al-Ahrash Camp in Rafah. There were no casualties. The Sinai province of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the shooting in a posting on an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account (Al-Youm al-Sabea, May 25, 2015).

Activity of the Bedouin tribes in Sinai

■ The Chairman of the Alliance of Bedouin Tribes in North Sinai said at a press conference that the tribes in Sinai supported the Egyptian security forces' anti-terrorism activity in Sinai. He said that many tribes in the Sinai Peninsula and elsewhere had signed an agreement to eliminate extremist organizations. That agreement includes the establishment of a "popular committee" of young members of the tribes, with the aim of

coping with terrorism, under the auspices of the Egyptian Army (Al-Youm al-Sabea, May 20, 2015).

Israeli Arabs

■ On May 22, 2015, it was reported that **Younis Madani Azem**, an Israeli Arab from Taibeh, was killed in the fighting between ISIS and the Syrian Army in Palmyra. Younis Madani Azem, 28, the father of three, was an infrastructure contractor. He left Israel in early January 2015 and informed his family that he had arrived in Syria and joined ISIS. On May 21, 2015, the family received a phone call informing them that he had been seriously wounded in Palmyra and later died of his wounds (Haaretz daily, May 22, 2015).



Younis Madani Azem, another Israeli Arab killed in Syria (Al-Masdar, May 22, 2015)

In the ITIC's assessment, the number of Israeli Arabs who joined the ranks of ISIS and other jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq is **several dozen**. Some of them were killed in battle and some returned to Israel and were put on trial. Most of those who go to Syria have a Salafist-jihadi background. Some of them are college students who, during their studies in Jordan or Europe, were exposed to the jihadi ideology and to contacts of global jihad organizations operating in Syria.³

³ For information about the phenomenon of Israeli-Arab foreign fighters, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from January 5, 2014: "Israeli Arabs and Palestinians Join the Ranks of the Rebels in Syria."

The global jihad in other countries

Algeria

■ **Abu Abdallah Uthman al-Asimi**, who headed a network by the name of the “**Army of the Caliphate**” (Jund al-Khilafa), which sees itself as **ISIS’s branch in Algeria**, was killed in a military operation carried out by the Algerian security forces in the Bouira province on May 20, 2015, (All4Syria, May 21, 2015). **On May 22, 2015, an ISIS-affiliated Twitter account** posted an announcement of his death. He was reportedly killed along with another 24 operatives.



Left: The bodies of the operatives who were killed. Right: Abu Abdallah Uthman al-Asimi (https://twitter.com/faris_fawares/status/602360141481189376, May 22, 2015)

Libya

■ On May 20, 2015, after a fierce battle, **ISIS gained control of Camp Jalit, east of the city of Sirte**, which serves as the headquarters of a Libyan Army brigade. At the camp, ISIS operatives seized a large quantity of military supplies, weapons and vehicles (<http://www.alwasat.ly/ar>). ISIS issued a statement signed by the “Information Office of the Tripoli province” about the takeover of Camp Jalit. According to the statement, the battles there are still raging (ISIS-affiliated forum, May 20, 2015).



Photos published by ISIS showing a tank and additional weapons seized at Camp Jalit
(<http://imgur.com/a/yyOyC>)

■ **Bernardino León**, the UN envoy to Libya, spoke about the growing threat to Libya posed by ISIS operatives. **In a speech, he warned against the rapid growth of ISIS in Libya. According to him, the number of ISIS operatives in Libya is around two thousand** (<http://www.alwatanvoice.com>, May 23, 2015).

Saudi Arabia

■ On May 22, 2015, a suicide bomber equipped with an explosive belt blew himself up in the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque, in the center of the **town of Qudaih**. This town is situated **in the east of the Qatif province in Saudi Arabia**, an area where **most of the population is Shiite**. Twenty-one people were killed and a few dozen were wounded (Al-Riyadh, May 23, 2015). According to initial eyewitness reports, the suicide bomber was wearing traditional Afghan clothing. **ISIS published a signed claim of responsibility, issued by the Najd province information office**. The statement noted that the suicide bombing attack was carried out by **Abu Amer al-Najdi**, by means of an explosive belt. **ISIS threatened to eradicate all the Shiites from the Arabian Peninsula** (ISIS-affiliated forum, May 22, 2015).

■ **Hezbollah condemned the blast in the Imam Ali Mosque in the town of Qudaih**. The organization claimed that "*takfiri* terrorist elements" do not differentiate between Sunnis and Shiites, or between Muslims and non-Muslims, and that they act violently against everyone. Hezbollah **blamed the Saudi authorities for the attack, on the grounds that** the state is cultivating and sponsoring the criminals (Al-Ahed, May 22, 2015).

Tunisia

- On May 20, 2015, the Ifriqiya propaganda institution, which belongs to a network by the name of “**The Uqba eben Nafi Battalion**,” posted a message on its Twitter page stating that it has **pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** (Tunis Al-Aan, May 20, 2015).
- **Budra Qalool**, head of the Tunisian Center for Security and Military Studies, said that studies recently conducted by the Center had found that approximately **700 women from Tunisia had joined the ranks of ISIS**. Many of them went to Syria and hold various positions in ISIS. According to Qalool, they hold teaching positions and recruit fighters, among other things (Al-Jarida al-Tunisia, May 21, 2015).

The battle for hearts and minds conducted by ISIS

Somalia

- On an ISIS-affiliated forum, ISIS published a video signed by the “Information Office of the Euphrates province,” addressing its operatives in Somalia. The video shows five operatives of Somali descent addressing Muslims in Somalia in their own language and calling on them to join ISIS, which “fulfills the laws of God and fights against the Christian Ethiopians” (ISIS-affiliated forum, May 21, 2015).

New issue of the Dabiq Journal

- On May 22, 2015, ISIS published the ninth issue of **Dabiq**, its online English-language organ published monthly by ISIS’s media arm, the Al-Hayat Media Center. The ninth issue, entitled “They Plot and Allah Plots,” includes articles and advertisements for selected videos and radio broadcasts produced in the various provinces of the Islamic State. A few of the articles:

- An article entitled “The Perfect Storm,” about ISIS’s transition from a local organization in Iraq to international phenomenon which threatens the West and continues to grow despite Western efforts to stop it.
- An article entitled “In the Words of the Enemy,” which includes quotes from Western journalists, consultants and experts advising the US government to cooperate with jihadi organizations in order to fight against ISIS.

- An article discussing ISIS's medical infrastructure and listing the diverse state-of-the-art medical services that it provides.
- An article entitled "Advancing East and West," about the coalition's efforts to stop the expansion of the Islamic State and, on the other hand, ISIS's success in taking over more territory in Syria and Iraq.
- An article about the battles conducted by ISIS in the Al-Yarmouk refugee camp south of Damascus.



The cover of the ninth issue of ISIS's organ, Dabiq, entitled "They Plot and Allah Plots"